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The Nature and Extent of the French Resistance Against Nazi Occupation During World War II

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**The Nature and Extent of the French Resistance Against Nazi Occupation
During World War II**

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HIS 490 History Honors Thesis

Department of History

Providence College

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*We lived in the shadows as soldiers of the night, but our lives were not dark and martial. . .
There were arrests, torture, and death for so many of our friends and comrades, and tragedy
awaited all of us just around the corner. But we did not live in or with tragedy. We were
exhilarated by the challenge and rightness of our cause. It was in many ways the worst of
times and in just as many ways the best of times, and the best is what we remember today.*

- Jean-Pierre Levy

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The word “resistance” will be capitalized when referring to the movement. When it is lower cased, it refers to an individual act of resistance carried out by a person, group, network, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

PREVIOUS WORKS ON THE RESISTANCE IN FRANCE

“There exists no satisfactory history of the French Resistance, that is, no work which provides a full and balanced account of resistance by Frenchmen to Nazi Germany both inside and outside occupied France. Particularly in Britain and the United States, historians have too often taken de Gaulle as their primary point of reference and, unconsciously or otherwise, accepted the general validity of his perspective on events without trying to imagine the view from the other side of the channel.”¹

While de Gaulle may have thought of himself as the symbol of the resistance, de Gaulle’s claim that there would have been no resistance to German occupation without his radio broadcast of June 18, 1940, is simply preposterous. The fact of the matter is that de Gaulle, while influential, was not the center of the resistance – that title goes to the men and women who, whether actively or passively, knowingly acted against Nazi Germany; people like Jean Moulin (selected by de Gaulle as his personal representative in France), those involved with the French Communist Party, Henri Giraud, and almost 400,000 others who were actively involved in the Resistance over the course of the war.

For roughly the first two years, de Gaulle paid no attention to whatever resistance there actually was – any activities carried out were done without his approval, knowledge, or cooperation. While actual resistors existed in France, de Gaulle spent much of the war safely

¹Jonathon H. King, “Emmanuel d’Astier and the Nature of the French Resistance,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 8, Issue 4 (October 1973): 25.

splitting his time in either London or Algiers, while encouraging others to resist. A much more accurate way to describe de Gaulle's position within the Resistance would be to view him as one of the first to call others to action, and one of the last to heed the call; in the end, he would use the symbolism and lingering feelings of the resistance as a way to gain power as the head of the new French state that would be created after the liberation.

When it comes to the activities carried out by the French Resistance, one inevitably runs into a problem – the myth created by de Gaulle when he said in August of 1944, six months before the liberation of France was complete, “This is one of those moments that transcends each one of our poor lives... Paris free! Liberated by herself! Liberated by her people with the support of the armies of France, with the support of the whole of France! Of the France which fights on, the only France, the real France, the eternal France!”² The myth here is easily understood – France was not liberated by herself – without the actions and sacrifices of British, American, Canadian, Russian, and the rest of the Allies, France would not have been able to overthrow the German occupation. France was not liberated by Frenchmen – it was liberated by an international coalition.

De Gaulle went on to develop his own version of history, claiming that *all* of France took part in resisting the German occupation. In reality, it was a very small minority of the population – according to Allied Supreme Headquarters, a minority as small as 400,000 – roughly two percent of the adult population in 1944. Even then, many of those 400,000 were what have come to be known as eleventh hour resisters – those who only engaged in active resistance after the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944 – when it had become clear that Nazi Germany was losing the war. Intelligence reports from Supreme Allied Headquarters dated July 11, 1944, five

²Patrick Marnham, *Resistance and Betrayal: The Death and Life of the Greatest Hero of the French Resistance* (New York: Random House, 2000), 217.

weeks after the Normandy invasion, put the total number of resisters at 393,470, with less than thirty percent possessing a firearm of their own, again proving this point. Another statistic, according to the official record of wartime intelligence services lists a grand total of slightly more than 89,000 members of resistance organizations - those most often associated with the armed resistance³. The former chief of staff of the military intelligence service of the Underground puts the number of 'true' resisters at less than 45,000 – less than fifteen hundredths of a percent of the adult population of France (with 'true resisters' referring to those who actively engaged in acts subversive to the German war effort before June 1944).⁴ In referencing this point, when asked of the impact the resistance in France had on the outcome of the war, Albert Speer, Minister of Armaments and War for Germany, responded saying "What French resistance?" – clearly indicating that resistance in France was carried out by only a small portion of the population.

Alain Peyrefitte, in his book *The Trouble with France* (1981), argued that the average French citizen lives with a deeply rooted sense of malaise and apathy directed towards anything relating to warfare, and it was a combination of their military incompetence and poor planning, not the superiority of the German war machine that led to their rapid defeat. Though this source expands well beyond the parameters of the Second World War (as observations are offered on the state of France since medieval times up to and including modern France), the large section relating to the Resistance during World War II, explained how many Frenchmen simply did not care that their country was being occupied – indeed, he points out that the Germans were, on

³Werner Rings, *Life with the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler's Europe, 1939-1945*, trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1982), 191, 211; Peter Liberman, *Does Conquest Pay? The Exploitation of Occupied Industrial Societies* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998), 54.

⁴Rings, 191.

some occasions, welcomed with open arms. Much of the book focuses on the basic idea that France has always been troubled by one continuing problem – a carefree attitude derived from an overly centralized governmental structure, resulting in the people’s inability to make decisions for themselves. Peyrefitte also notes what he feels is the true reason for the rapid French defeat:

Today, the French have the right and...the duty to acknowledge, however much it contradicts their received ideas, that the debacle was in no way due to a ‘crushing’ superiority in the quantity of German arms. It was the organization that was wrong, the ideas that were false. The tanks, instead of being concentrated in powerful armored division, were scattered through the whole army at the disposal of the infantry, which didn’t need them. The planes, instead of being based near the front, were dispersed over a number of fields in the rear – as far away as North Africa. Sometimes there were no pilots for the planes, at others, no planes for the pilots.⁵

This fact is corroborated by Alexander Werth, who observes that while France had 3,000 tanks on the ground in France (which, at the very least, equaled the strength of the German Panzer divisions), they were scattered throughout the army.⁶ Had they been organized into an effective armored force along the defensive lines, events in the war against Germany may have gone quite differently.

Poor military planning was compounded twofold by apathy towards fighting in the first place – on more than one occasion, there are reports of commanding officers being shot by their own men or locals for refusing to retreat. A tank commander was killed by villagers for refusing to abandon the defense of a strategic bridge over the Cher River near Vierzon. On June 20, “a French colonel who ordered his unit to break through encircling German forces was shot by his

⁵Alain Peyrefitte, *The Trouble With France* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 19.

⁶Alexander Werth, *De Gaulle: A Political Biography* (Great Britain: Penguin Books), 91.

own men.”⁷ Where fighting did continue on the part of the French after the armistice, it was a minority plot:

Many soldiers manning the Maginot Line went on fighting even after the armistice; the future Marshal Delattre de Tassigny held up the Germans for many days at Rethel on the Aisne. And Colonel de Gaulle, having scraped together a couple hundred tanks, effectively resisted the German pressure and counter attacked during the whole second fortnight in May – first at Montcornet, near Laon, then at Abbeville.⁸

There are also stories about French colonial troops who continued to fight, knowing that the war had been lost.

Was the war even winnable in the first place? De Gaulle certainly believed that victory would have been achieved had his advice been followed – moving air bases near the front lines, concentrating tanks into armored divisions, going on the offensive, et cetera – but one must also remember, Germany had come within weeks of defeating Russia just over a year later, who not only had more tanks than France, but had more planes, more men, more weapons, and more motivation to fight (after all, retreat and surrender often meant death in Stalin’s Russia). For the historian looking back on these events, one can only see the French collapse as inevitable. Germany was too well armed, too well-led, and too confident to have been stopped. France probably would have fallen anyway – it was simply a matter of when. Had de Gaulle’s advice been followed, defeat may have only been staved off by a matter of days, weeks, perhaps even a couple of months, but only if France fought particularly well. In the end, France would have surely capitulated.

One of the more useful texts on the subject was Agnes Humbert’s *Resistance: A*

⁷Rings, 59.

⁸Werth, 91.

Woman's Journal of Struggle and Defiance in Occupied France; Humbert gives insight into various means to carry out acts of sabotage – such as ruining machinery and intentionally producing a poor product. Humbert spent the war years founding and working with the resistance group known *Groupe du musée de l'Homme* (Group of the Museum of Man), one of the first resistance groups organized in occupied France. Humbert also wrote for the clandestine newspaper run by the *Groupe*, a volume known as *Résistance*, until they were betrayed and arrested in April of 1941 after producing only seven newsheets. The remainder of the book tells of her years spent in prison and German war factories, where she continued to resist by sabotaging German machinery and the various manufactured goods she was meant to produce for the Germans. After January 1943, Humbert mentions that her only consolation in dealing with living as a prisoner – her attempts at sabotage in forced labor factories. These acts would include producing unusable rayon (used for uniforms, parachutes, and underwear, among other applications) by intentionally matting threads, breaking cogs and gears in machines, and by simply ‘being careless,’ knowing full well that every unit produced would aid the German war effort.

Perhaps the best source on the growth of the Resistance movement into a unified whole, Patrick Marnham's *Resistance and Betrayal: The Death and Life of the Greatest Hero of the French Resistance*, is a biography of Jean Moulin, the man who was sent to occupied France by Charles de Gaulle to unify the various Resistance groups into a single movement. Moulin's work would be the driving force behind the creation of the *Mouvements unis de Résistance* (MUR) Patrick Marnham argues that without the work of Moulin, there would have been no unified Resistance at all – something that would have lessened the effectiveness of the Normandy invasion, based on the level of success the different resistance groups had in

thwarting German troop movements by sabotaging railroads, cutting telephone wires, and gathering intelligence for the Allies. This source is also particularly useful in understanding two main points relating to the Resistance – first, before a unified Resistance was formed, the various Resistance groups often fought amongst themselves as often as they fought the German occupation, most likely as a way of eliminating any future competition that would stand in their way in the formation of a new French state; second, Marnham includes the work of the communist parties – a group that is often overlooked by historians simply because of their political viewpoint and association with the Russians.

M.R.D. Foot is the official historian of the Special Operations Executive, a covert British organization with the goal of fostering both minor and major sabotage, espionage, reconnaissance behind German lines, and “everything from minor attacks on troops... to full-blooded insurrection.”⁹ Foot produced a very important work on resistance in all of occupied Europe, entitled *Resistance: European Resistance to Nazism 1940-45*, Foot gives a general overview of the different types of resistance – broken down into three general types - intelligence, escape, and subversion. The first two types are self explanatory; subversion is subdivided into four categories – sabotage, attacks on troops or individuals, politics, and insurrection. After a brief introduction, he turned to a country by country summary of the major acts of resistance against the occupation. Foot also had access to knowledge of weapons developed for use by resistance fighters, including the welrod pistol, (a bolt action, magazine fed, suppressed pistol designed by the Inter-Services Research Bureau, later known as Station IX, for use by resistance groups), and plastic explosive.¹⁰ Foot’s premise over the course of the book is to demonstrate the nature and extent of resistance offered by those living in occupied Europe.

⁹Marnham, 41.

¹⁰M.R.D. Foot, *Resistance: European Resistance to Nazism 1940-45* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1977), 45.

Werner Rings, in his book *Life with the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler's Europe, 1939-1945*, examines the response of the peoples of conquered Europe to the occupation by the German armed forces. His most important contribution to the subject at hand is when he breaks down the vague categories of collaboration and resistance into smaller, more accurately defined categories. Rings differentiates collaborationists into three categories – conditional collaborators – those who believed some of the policies of National Socialism and were hoping to change other circumstances to fit their own belief system; unconditional collaborators – those who joined forces with the occupying force as a result of a fully-fledged endorsement of the principles of National Socialism; and neutral collaborators – those who do not support national socialism, but agree to follow its policies, agreeing that personal survival through the war trumped national survival. Resistance is divided into four categories - including ‘symbolic’ – those who demonstrated loyalty to their defeated nations without overt action against the occupying power (the singing of *la Marseillaise*, for example); ‘polemic’ – those who protested the occupying power by way of strikes or convincing others of the need for continued struggle; ‘defensive’ – those who came to the rescue of others in need (downed pilots, for example); and finally, ‘offensive’ – those who physically took up arms to fight the occupying power, those members of the underground who fought and sacrificed their lives for the cause which they believed in.

While there clearly was a resistance, the level of resistance has been grossly over exaggerated, especially when it comes to the level of involvement of Charles de Gaulle – there was much activity as far as espionage and sabotage are concerned, but not much in terms of armed resistance, save for communist guerillas and the Spanish *maquis*, meaning bush. Mostly communists, the *maquis* were people who fled to the bush, in the remote mountain areas of the

Alps and the Jura, the Pyrenees and the Massif Central, in order to escape the Nazi forced labor acts of 1944.¹¹ The most numerous and substantial forms of resistance were the clandestine press and the gathering of intelligence. Intelligence gathering would reach its peak level during the month of May 1944, on the eve of the Allied landings in Normandy – some 3,700 reports were radioed to Britain during the one month dealing directly with the German fortifications and troop movements.¹²

In terms of de Gaulle as a leader, both the Americans and English distrusted his motives, despite whatever show of unity they demonstrated to the world. Winston Churchill had a problem with the recognition of de Gaulle as the leader of the French government-in-exile for as long as the two were in contact. In the summer of 1943, Churchill even attempted to “eliminate de Gaulle as a political force” as he showed many of the “symptoms of a budding Fuhrer” – as he was “animated by dictatorial instincts and consumed by personal ambition,” and, later, “watched the revolutionary stirrings in the European Underground with a wary and suspicious eye.”¹³ Roosevelt, in recognizing many of the same qualities in de Gaulle that were noticed by Churchill, “had established a violent antipathy towards de Gaulle. Convinced that the French leader was a double-crosser, a menace, and “a budding dictator – possibly even... a new fascist leader” he called on Churchill to ‘break with him.’”¹⁴ American policy towards de Gaulle would stay much the same until the eve of the Normandy invasion, when Supreme Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower issued the following statement:

¹¹Rings, 177.

¹²Ibid., 191.

¹³Norman Rose, *Churchill: the Unruly Giant* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 373; Rings, 240.

¹⁴Rings, 240; Rose, 374.

For a nation which fights bound hand and foot against an oppressor armed to the teeth, battle discipline imposes several conditions. The first is strict obedience to instructions given by the French government and by French leaders which it has qualified to so act. The second condition is that our action in the rear of the enemy shall be coordinated as closely as possible with the action of the Allied and French armies. Now, we must expect that the struggle of the armies will be hard and long. That means that the action of the forces of the Resistance must go on and increase to the moment of the German collapse.¹⁵

In attempting to show some of these ‘dictatorial’ qualities possessed by de Gaulle, Robert Mengin, included the full text of de Gaulle’s *Act of Engagement* – a document that once signed, committed a man to personal allegiance to de Gaulle – not France. The document also forbade a French national from joining the British or Canadian navies, as the act ensured de Gaulle the exclusive right to any Frenchman on British soil.¹⁶ He also goes on to question de Gaulle’s credentials for ‘leading’ the resistance:

1) Did anyone have the right to encourage the Resistance inside France to take risks that he himself did not share? (2) Was it in the interest of the cause that some men should be sent to their deaths because the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church? (3) As for the information reaching the *Bureau Central de Renseignement et d’Action* (BCRA), was it accurate enough to base on it orders to the Resistance to kill persons designated as collaborators by this London bureau, which was directed by a colonel of the extreme right?¹⁷

¹⁵ Arthur Layton Funk, *Charles de Gaulle: the Crucial Years, 1943-1944* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 260.

¹⁶ Robert Mengin, trans. Jay Allen, *No Laurels for de Gaulle* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), vi.

¹⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 1

THE STATE OF FRANCE BY 1941

As the combined air and ground forces of Nazi Germany poured across the border into Poland in the early morning hours of September 1, 1939, starting the Second World War, French soldiers waited on full alert behind a thick line of defenses known as the Maginot Line – a string of fortifications, bunkers, tank traps, lookout posts, and artillery emplacements initially meant as a buffer zone between France and Germany, France’s historic enemy. This line allowed France to have only a portion of its man-power mobilized for war, keeping a large percentage in reserve. The idea behind construction was simple enough – slow down any military advance by the enemy long enough so that the regular French army could mobilize and counter-attack, which would have taken about two to three weeks. France was also unprepared in terms of drafting the soldiers necessary in order to defend against an invasion. In his memoir, referencing both of these problems with military planning, Raoul Aglion writes:

When World War II broke out... I, like most men my age, was not drafted, since the French government considered itself invulnerable behind the mighty Maginot Line, the massive chain of fortifications that lined the frontier with Germany... We French were exuberant as ever. Proud of our impregnable border, and counting on the success of the British naval blockade of Germany, we were absolutely confident of an eventual victory against Hitler.¹⁸

¹⁸Raoul Aglion, *Roosevelt and de Gaulle: Allies in Conflict; a Personal Memoir* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 1.

Here, we see two important facts: first, France refused to implement a draft system (at least until it was too late); second, believing the Maginot Line to be an “impregnable border”, France was unprepared for the speed and strength of the German advance.

After Hitler ignored the French and British ultimatum to withdraw from Poland by September 3, both democracies declared war and began mobilizing; France would send whole divisions forward to the Maginot Line where they would sit behind the defenses as part of the “phony war” until May of 1940. It was then that the German war machine rolled through Belgium, pushing through the dense Ardennes Forest, something thought of as impossible by for a modern army, and into France. The Germans were met with only small opposition – the Franco-Belgian border was essentially unfortified, as the French had held on to the mistaken belief that Germany would respect Belgian neutrality.¹⁹

The German attack on France began on May 10. On May 11, a small Potez reconnaissance plane took off on a routine scouting mission from Montceau-le-Waast, near Laon. The observer, one “Captain Andreva, ‘saw armored columns, their headlights piercing the darkness, driving through the region that doctrine declared was impenetrable.’”²⁰ The next day, another observer was sent:

The Potez, skimming the ground, flew over advancing columns... [and] saw motorcyclists, truckloads of infantry, armored cars, light tanks. There was no longer any doubt: at least one armored division, perhaps two... The officer, Major H-----, a staff college graduate, flatly refused to believe the observer. ‘Impossible!’ he repeated. His theory, the military bureaucracy’s theory was stronger than the facts... the duty officer, ironically, asked this tank lieutenant if he could recognize a tank, and hung up.²¹

¹⁹Aglion, 2.

²⁰Peyrefitte, 20.

²¹Ibid.

This quote summarizes the way in which the French fought the early stages of the war. They were woefully unprepared for changes in the ways of modern warfare, not because of a military weakness, but as a result of unwillingness to accept there was a new style of war. In making note of this, it is important to understand that France was not militarily weak – with British aid, France had as many tanks, and a comparable air force to that of Germany.²² The problem lay with the organization of the army. Instead of being organized into tank battalions to be used on the offensive, tanks were scattered throughout infantry divisions in a purely support role, thus minimizing their effectiveness on the battlefield. In terms of forces on the ground, France had one of the stronger land armies in Europe at the time, with forces numbering about nine hundred thousand men, with the ability to mobilize an additional five million reservists, approximately one-third of all able-bodied men in France. By the time of the French surrender in June, the French forces in the field would number more than two million.²³ For the sake of comparison, Germany held a numerical advantage of about five hundred thousand, a number which was greatly outnumbered when factoring in the number of British soldiers allied with France.

The history of the war in France between May and June of 1940 is well documented, and needs only a brief summary. After the initial German breakthrough at Sedan on May 14, German tank and infantry divisions continued on deeper into France with nothing to stop them but the English Channel. With British and French forces cornered in Belgium, the end of May brought the Allies to the point of collapse in Dunkirk. Belgium would surrender on May 27, and June would mean the start of the evacuations to England. The “Weygand Line,” another

²²Peyrefitte, 19.

²³Aglion, 2.

defensive line similar to the Maginot Line, was overrun on June 6. Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda for Germany, notes that since June 5, while France continues to fight stubbornly, over 200,000 French soldiers had been taken prisoner, and the German flag was flying over Versailles.²⁴

Though the French were, for all intents and purposes, defeated, Hitler would phone Goebbels and say there will be “no talk of peace at the moment. First the French must go down to their knees.”²⁵ The German armies would enter Paris on June 14; the French government had fled the city four days earlier. By June 16, 1940, much of northern France had been overrun, and heavy fighting had commenced along the Maginot Line. Within a matter of days, news would reach Berlin that France had capitulated on June 14. Prime Minister, Paul Reynaud resigned, handing Power over to General Henri Philippe Pétain who would accept the German’s terms unconditionally. Pétain would deliver a speech, where he would say:

People of France, as requested by the President of the Republic, I shall henceforth be the leader of the French government. Convinced of the affection of our admirable army, whose heroism stands as testimony to our long military tradition as they fight an enemy which outnumbered them, convinced that our army’s resistance has fulfilled our duty towards our allies, convinced of the support pledged by the former soldiers I led, convinced of the French people’s faith in me, I give France the gift of myself, to ease its troubles... My heart is heavy as I tell you today that the fight must end. Last night, I spoke with our adversary and asked if they were prepared to help me, between soldiers, after the fight, with honor intact, to find a way to end the hostilities.²⁶

²⁴Joseph Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries: 1939-1941*, trans. Fred Taylor (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1983), 122.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Marcel Ophuls, *Le Chagrin et la Pitié: Chronique d’une Ville Française sous l’Occupation* (Los Angeles Image Entertainment: 1971).

Once the surrender was announced in Germany, Goebbels wrote in his diary – “A historic moment. Now the guns fall silent throughout France... A victory, such as we could not have imagined in our wildest dreams, is ours.”²⁷

The willingness of France to accept the terms of Germany; their seemingly unanimous decision to follow Pétain; the overwhelming government support to collaborate with the German occupiers (many had thought fleeing to Britain would be tantamount to deserting the people in their time of need, giving the initial impression of cowardice); all of this leads one to believe that the French were happy to end the war, and happy to become part of the new German-dominated Europe.

The French government headed by Marshal Pétain banked on being able to come to terms with Hitler... If they fled to join Britain in the continuing fight against Hitler, they were deserting the people... in their direst hour of need. If they stayed put, they were abandoning themselves and their countries to the enemy and betraying their foreign friends and allies... Those who stayed put and faced the victorious Germans, even at the expense of submitting to them, seemed steadfast and courageous. Those who took to their heels, even with a view to fighting on under foreign military aegis, gave an initial impression of disloyalty and cowardice.²⁸

Pétain had hoped to be brought into the “New European Order” as an equal partner to Germany, as quickly and seamlessly as possible – to the point that he would make concessions to Germany that were never expected or asked for. As Werner Rings later writes, the Franco-German armistice was not a minority plot, but rather:

The whole of France, both in and out of uniform, not only wanted peace but made peace without waiting to see what would emerge from the armistice negotiations. Anyone who continued to resist was endangering everyone else’s chances of survival. Wherever

²⁷Goebbels, 122-124.

²⁸Rings, 46-47.

resistance still smoldered, it was the vanquished who quenched it.²⁹

Supporting Rings' theory, Henri Frenay, the founder of the Resistance group *Mouvement de Liberation National*, in discussing the situation by August of 1940, writes about the average French citizen, saying ““they were adapting themselves to defeat just as they had to victory’... [and that] ‘Ninety percent of all Frenchmen... take the view that this war isn’t their war.’”³⁰

The French desire to partake in the new German Europe is clearly demonstrated by the actions taken over the coming months - France would send 3,000 men, as part a brigade known as the *Légion des Volontaires Francais*, to fight as a part of the Wehrmacht in the USSR. After the Waffen-SS abandoned its Nordic prejudices in July 1943, some 3,000 more Frenchmen volunteered. These two groups of volunteers were eventually merged into a single division, known as ‘Charlemagne.’³¹

Collaboration with the German occupiers was popular during the early years of the occupation, especially in the areas of business and industry. “By April 1941, French industry had secured German contracts to the value of 1.5 billion reichsmarks [about 375 million US dollars at the time]. By April 1942, the value of these transactions amounted to 2.36 billion reichsmarks, and in the autumn of the same year it crossed the 4-billion threshold.”³² German figures from early spring of 1942 list some 845,000 French workers employed exclusively by the Third Reich, producing munitions, fortifications, and airfields on French soil. When it came to railroad construction workers and manufacturers of machine tools, respectively, 100 and 95 percent of

²⁹Rings, 59-60.

³⁰Henri Frenay, quoted in Werner Rings, 61.

³¹Marnham, 237.

³² Rings, 76-77.

the output of each was to the benefit of Germany.³³ The leaders of French industry at the start of the war were only too happy to move to unoccupied France, and relished the chance to do business with Germany:

They were among the first to place themselves wholeheartedly at the service of the German war economy...under pressure from powerful industrial and financial interests, the French authorities caved in. They approved the manufacture for Germany, first of transport, and ultimately of combat aircraft. One last stipulation was upheld: the warplanes must not be equipped with weapons of destruction.³⁴

The earliest resisters were members of the lowest income classes – such as the peasant group known as *Confédération Général d'Agriculture* (CGA) organized by Pierre Tanguy-Prigent in 1943.³⁵ As Brian Jenkins writes, “ordinary French men and women are not our concern here, any more than middle-ranking officers can be held responsible for the battle of France: it is the elites who must be called to account.”³⁶ Pierre Mendes France, who would serve as the Prime Minister of France during the 1950’s, would say “Certain military circles shared the attitude of many civilians, and tackled the war unenthusiastically... I’m not saying they were traitors. In any case, there were very few traitors. But this attitude of preferring Hitler to Léon Blum, a noted French Socialist politician, was an attitude that had become very popular in bourgeois circles. And this was a circle to which many of the soldiers belonged.”³⁷

³³Rings, 82-83.

³⁴Ibid., 70.

³⁵Ibid., 86.

³⁶Zeev Sternhell and Brian Jenkins, eds, *France in the Era of Fascism: Essays on the French Authoritarian Right* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 43.

³⁷Ophuls.

While volunteers for both German created units and work in German war factories were plentiful, Hitler had trouble accepting the majority at face value – the Wehrmacht was disinclined to accept many of the all-out collaborators from the two main French fascist parties. Over 13,400 had volunteered for the Wehrmacht in the first few months of the war, though only 3,000 were eventually accepted. By the estimation of German figures, only 6,400 had been enrolled by May of 1943. These troops were required to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler, wear German field grey uniforms, and serve as members of German infantry regiments.³⁸ While France was still actively involved in the war versus Germany, 59,000 French workers voluntarily left to take up jobs in the Third Reich in the sixteen months immediately following the French capitulation.³⁹

When it comes to the reason why France had its fair share of collaborators, there are many possible explanations – there were those who collaborated out of a desire to buy time for France’s ultimate re-entrance into the war on the side of the Allies, those who collaborated under the belief that the German victory was total, and those who collaborated in an attempt to sign a joint peace treaty with Britain and Germany. Whatever the reasons, collaborators agreed that working with Germany was a necessary evil in order to protect internal order from the potential of social revolution.

Many areas of France had only the slightest experience with occupation – in paraphrasing one such village referenced to by Agnes Humbert, the town saw only little interaction between villagers and the actual war, though, when Germans actually *did* show up, villagers did

³⁸Rings, 102-103.

³⁹Ibid., 79.

everything “but [lick] their boots.”⁴⁰ In order to understand the mindset of the average French leader, one had to look no further than the comments made by French Minister Jean Pozzi on June 22, 1940, when he said:

The war is over, the Nazi’s have won. The defeat is complete. Hitler is so clever. We must accept defeat and abide by the terms of the surrender. A Nazi Europe may endure for hundreds of years. It will be painful for us, but our grandchildren will be able to live in the great Nazi empire of Europe.⁴¹

The immediate impact of defeat was the outpouring of eight million refugees⁴² from northern France, all heading south, in front of the German advance. In what has become known as *la déroute*, civilians became obstacles to any soldier wishing to leave the continent and join the fight elsewhere, in Great Britain, for example. In the chaos that ensued, refugees fled with whatever they could fit into their cars, or on their backs - after the Fall of France refugees began appearing around the country, “their ramshackle vehicles were laden with mattresses, chicken coops, and casseroles.”⁴³ “There was an enormous upsurge of the people who were completely panicked, terrified... yet this wave of people continued to move south.”⁴⁴ Alexander Werth would write about *la déroute*, saying:

Anyone who, like myself, was in France during that terrible month, will remember the millions of refugees streaming south in trains, in cars, on bicycles, even on foot; and will remember too the distress, anger, and bewilderment of an entire nation – anger against the politicians, against the press with its ‘Maginot Line’ smokescreen,

⁴⁰Agnes Humbert, *Resistance: A Woman’s Journal of Struggle and Defiance in Occupied France*, trans. Barbara Mellor (New York, Bloomsbury USA, 2008), 209.

⁴¹Aglion, 4.

⁴²Peter Sorrell, “The French Resistance Movement in Occupied France” (Lecture, Brookdale Community College, World War II Studies Program Series, May 17, 2011).

⁴³Peyrefitte, 18.

⁴⁴Ophuls.

anger against the generals, anger against the English, especially after Dunkirk. He will remember the demoralization among the soldiers and the same old story of how the officers had 'fled in cars, leaving the soldiers behind'. Realizing, at least after the first week of June, that the war was lost, thousands of soldiers deserted.⁴⁵

At the same time, there were many citizens who were forcefully deported because they had expressed a desire to remain French – over 100,000 citizens of Alsace and Lorraine were deported to Vichy in November of 1940.⁴⁶

As Agnes Humbert writes in her autobiography, after learning that France was seeking an armistice, “there was no longer any point in denying it: we had no choice, we had to admit that the unthinkable had happened. The people of France were on their knees, begging for mercy, still fighting here and there, fleeing in all directions, and now all I could hear was ‘Paris has fallen!’”⁴⁷ Indeed, Paris *had* fallen, and as the course of the war would dictate, it had fallen into the German alliance – as early as October 24, 1940, Goebbels remarks in his diary, “If France is well-advised, she is being offered a real chance... people are already talking about France’s entry into the war with England,” citing the German high command as being “very optimistic.”⁴⁸ Five days later, on the October 29, Vichy had agreed – and joined the German continental bloc, leaving England alone in the fight against Nazism.

While the elites in government (and the majority of French citizens) had put their faith in Pétain’s ability to negotiate for the benefit of France, even if that meant collaboration with Germany, there were still some early resisters. Resisters in this early stage of the war were,

⁴⁵Werth, 90.

⁴⁶Rings, 44.

⁴⁷Humbert, 5.

⁴⁸Goebbels, 152.

however, of a completely different breed than those after 1943. The first resistors were those who had a political opposition to Nazism – namely, communists, socialists, and anti-fascists. As Patrick Marnham contends, by November of 1940, there was not so much ‘resistance’, as there was ‘refusal’ – the refusal of both military defeat, and the refusal of living alongside the occupying army.⁴⁹ As Patrick Marnham writes, the first reported act of resistance occurred in Paris, when Surgeon Thierry de Martel committed public suicide in protest of the German occupation on the day the armistice was signed. A “German sentry was shot by an unidentified sniper in the French township of Woincourt (Somme) four days after the armistice.”⁵⁰ During the same time frame, telephone wires all across France were cut. Individuals, angry at the French capitulation, engaged in “countless uncoordinated acts of sabotage and displays of recalcitrance which persisted in France until the end of the year... Shots were sometimes fired at German soldiers or vehicles... They belonged to no organization and had not conspired with anyone else.”⁵¹

Charles de Gaulle would like to believe that his first radio broadcast over the BBC – now known as *l’appel du 18 Juin*, signaled the start of French Resistance. An appeal that sadly, went unrecorded, de Gaulle would later give a repeat broadcast in order to have it on record. *L’appel* was an impassioned call to the French people; de Gaulle urged them to continue the war by leaving mainland France in order to pick up the fight elsewhere. Over four minutes of air time, de Gaulle criticizes the leaders of France who had asked for the ceasefire, then extends an invitation to the officers and soldiers loyal to France to make contact and join him in London as

⁴⁹Marnham, 41-42.

⁵⁰Rings, 154-155.

⁵¹Ibid., 155.

part of the Fighting French (later changed to the Free French, as de Gaulle thought ‘Fighting French’ had negative connotations about it). De Gaulle points the finger at German military superiority for the reason behind French defeat, (which has already been established – it was simply not the case). De Gaulle finishes with a memorable quote, saying “The flame of French resistance will not be extinguished.”⁵² The initial broadcast did not reach a large audience, reaching only a minority of the French population; fewer than one in five of the French troops returning from Norway joined de Gaulle’s Fighting French.⁵³ When it comes down to it, de Gaulle’s appeal to the people was neither a success, nor was it the first – four days earlier, the newspapers around France urged the people to “stand up and fight, to resist, to remain free.”⁵⁴ *Le Moniteur*, a newspaper from Clermont was one of the first to make a call for resistance – ironic in that at the time, the owner of the newspaper, Pierre Laval, was preparing for surrender.

Phillip Williams, in discussing the earliest resisters, writes “the pioneers were usually Socialists, Catholic Democrats, or army officers.”⁵⁵ From the right, early support came only from individuals. Despite these facts, de Gaulle would have history believe that his radio broadcast encouraged the majority of Frenchmen to convert to the cause of the Resistance. This is not to say that Resistance was not beginning to accumulate - again turning to Agnes Humbert, on June 20, six days after Paris was occupied by the German armies, “This morning we heard that as fast as German posters are put up in Paris they are slashed and torn down again.”⁵⁶ Two

⁵²Marnham, 41.

⁵³Ibid., 237.

⁵⁴Ophuls.

⁵⁵Philip M. Williams, *Crisis and Compromise: Politics in the Fourth Republic* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 20.

⁵⁶Humbert, 8.

days later, on June 22, Winston Churchill, along with Minister of Economic Warfare, Hugh Dalton, would form the Special Operations Executive (SOE). Designed to stiffen resistance in France, activities included the gathering of military intelligence, organizing hideouts and escape lines for prisoners and downed Allied airmen, and planning acts of subversion.⁵⁷ By July 3, General de Gaulle's Fighting French Army had grown to some seven thousand men.⁵⁸ British warships, after an ultimatum was ignored to either "join the Free French, allow themselves to be disarmed, or head to a neutral port which was outside of German reach," opened fire on a French naval warships in the North African port of Mers-el-Kebir.⁵⁹ Over 1,300 French sailors would lose their lives, and Vichy would sever all diplomatic relations with the British government the next day.

Though many French citizens would today like to deny the fact, for the bulk of the war, France was actually an ally of Germany, and enacted laws regarding the treatment of Jews that were stricter than laws passed in Germany. The first law regarding the treatment of the Vichy Jewish population was passed on July 17, and was soon followed by five more, ever increasing in severity:

These laws banned 'foreigners' from public service and the professions and canceled thousands of Jewish naturalizations. Among the laws passed... was the first *Statut des Juifs*, which gave a wider definition of Jewish identity than the one adopted in Nazi Germany. Under Vichy, anyone with two Jewish grandparents was Jewish, even if they had converted to Christianity.⁶⁰

After the July 3 attacks on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir, "the French, whose faith in the English had been greatly shaken, made contact [with the Germans] for the first time... to

⁵⁷Marnham, 41.

⁵⁸Rings, 157.

⁵⁹Ophuls.

discuss the possibility of changing the armistice clauses to allow military collaboration.”⁶¹ On August 10, 1940, Pierre Laval, Prime Minister of Vichy since July 11, announced the formation of a volunteer air squadron that would join the Luftwaffe in air raids on England.⁶² Other pro-Nazi groups were formed – such as the *Milice* – “the paramilitary body of French militiamen raised to fight the resistance. The *Milice* took no prisoners; wounded resisters were shot even in hospitals, in some cases after being submitted to atrocious tortures.”⁶³ Indeed, the Resistance was never recognized as a regular force – they could expect no quarter – as is written by Philip Ouston:

At least 20,000 resisters were shot, and 115,000 were deported, of whom only 40,000 survived. Moreover, the FFI were not only engaged in the violence and counter-violence of a patriotic guerilla, they were also committed to the special anguish of a civil war. They were hunted by the Special Brigades of the French *Préfecture de Police*, and by Darnand’s militia⁶⁴, as well as by Germans.⁶⁵

After Hitler published the decree known as *Nacht und Nebel*, any hostile action against German forces in the occupied territories would be punished with death. The decree also established the Reich Security Service (RSHA) – a 2,000 man strong secret security force. The members of the RSHA were most often recruited from the SS, though it could also call on up to

⁶⁰Marnham, 37-38.

⁶¹Ophuls.

⁶²Ibid., 36-37.

⁶³Marnham, 189.

⁶⁴Joseph Darnand formed a small group of young militant “Legionaries” of the National Revolution, sworn to fight “democracy, the Gaullist Resistance and the Jewish contagion,” which was the nucleus of a brutal “anti-communist” auxiliary police force called *la milice* (militia)...to help the Germans seek out and destroy the Resistance networks operating inside France.

⁶⁵Philip Ouston, *France in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 213-217.

8,000 full time armed French agents who dressed in civilian clothes and carried German police identification.⁶⁶

For all intents and purposes, French activity in the war had come to an end by 1941 – though they would later rejoin the war in the dying days of 1944 on behalf of the Allies. The French lost the war militarily for failing to prepare for war effectively; failing to modernize their strategy; and failing to adapt to the new methods of warfare. The French went into the war with the wrong mind set. Rather than entering the war with gusto, they stepped in tentatively, with too much caution, too much malaise.

⁶⁶Marnham, 162-164.

CHAPTER 2

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE RESISTANCE (1940-1943)

Come late summer 1940, small groups of resistors began appearing inside of the French mainland, both inside the occupied zone, and in Vichy. The Resistance was broken into two categories – ‘movements’ and ‘networks’, though both tended to draw their members from the same sector of the population – “young men who acceded to responsibilities which French youth had been deprived of since the days of the revolution.”⁶⁷ A ‘movement’ referred to a politicized resistance group – those with an opposition to the principles of National Socialism. Movements in France were often associated with newspapers, one of the most commonly utilized resistance tactics. A ‘network’ was a unified group of cells with a tactical purpose - those most often organized as a part of the armed opposition. Networks usually included:

The resolute men of action who laid mines and hurled grenades; who engaged in ambushes and assassinations, arson and murder; who joined secret paramilitary combat teams or bands or armed partisans on their nuisance raids and foraging expeditions; who belonged to the secret armies that demoralized, harassed, and outmaneuvered units of the occupation forces by attacking them in the flank or rear; and, finally, who enabled the Allies to launch prearranged operations by systematically compiling useful items of intelligence about German dispositions and troop movements and passing them on to Allied headquarters.⁶⁸

⁶⁷Williams, 14.

⁶⁸Rings, 189.

Networks were organized in both France and England; many would work directly for the British. At any given time during the war, there were no fewer than 266 different networks, made up of more than 150,000 agents.⁶⁹ Many networks organized their own escape routes for downed airmen and escaped prisoners, which “surpassed everyone’s boldest expectations. Twenty-eight thousand fugitives were smuggled across the French-Spanish border alone, including twenty thousand Frenchmen (four hundred of them pilots) who were eager to join de Gaulle’s Free French forces.”⁷⁰

Groups of military officers who were not able to make it to London to meet up with de Gaulle held themselves ready to re-enter the war at a moment’s notice. Other military personnel hoped to continue fighting, wherever they were stationed. General Eugene Mittelhauser, the Commander in Chief of the French Expeditionary Force stationed in Beirut, continued the fight, though he would give in after receiving word that the other French colonial generals had accepted the armistice. The bulk of the French military, however, would accept the armistice. Part of the problem was that Paul Reynaud, Prime Minister until just before the occupation, felt it was beyond his power and influence to encourage the French people to do something which might endanger their well being and violate their right to life.

While still numerically small, the Resistance grew larger as a combination of harsh German policies and Pétain’s leadership infuriated the citizens of France. Any initial respect Pétain had been lost when he “[repudiated] not only the parliamentary system but the republic itself. His effort to construct a clerico-fascist regime appealed to an extreme right-wing fringe

⁶⁹Sorrel.

⁷⁰Rings, 174.

and to a few maverick Leftists, but it quickly alienated the mass of citizens.”⁷¹ Many people considered Pétain’s plan to be a ploy to trick the Germans in order to protect France from a worse fate. These *attentistes*, as they are known, expected the war to be won by “the Russian soldier, the British fleet, American money, and the *Comédie Française*.”⁷² Pétain immediately set to work dismantling the constitution of the Third Republic including eliminating the office of president, suspending parliament (and eventually disbanding it), and giving himself the right to name his own successor – in essence, Pétain was creating a dictatorship – as Wright points out:

The suppression of political parties, of free labor unions, and of farmers’ organizations; the attempt to lay the groundwork for a single party, to regiment labor through a government-imposed Labor Charter, to control the farmers through a Peasant Corporation created from the top – all these moves pointed to a corporate structure similar to that of Salazar in Portugal. Pétain’s rather abortive attempt to revive the old French provinces of prerevolutionary days showed the influence of Charles Maurras’ native variety of Fascism... It was easy to see that most of them looked toward a semi-fascist system rather than merely a powerful executive authority within the framework of democracy.⁷³

While still hoping to draft a suitable constitution, Pétain eventually decided against this on January 1, 1942, vowing to not draft one until France was free of all foreign troops.

Civilians soon joined the Resistance networks, forming their own cells of ten “like-minded comrades, no more.”⁷⁴ Escape routes were formed that escorted escaped prisoners of war and downed airmen to the safety offered by neutral Spain. One such route was organized by a twenty-three-year-old Belgian girl who, through contacts known to her family and friends,

⁷¹Wright, 28.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., 29.

⁷⁴Humbert, 11.

established an escape network stretching from Brussels, through both zones of France, to Spain. “She procured civilian clothes, false papers, compasses, iron rations, and drugs... in three years, she smuggled eight hundred Britons – officers and enlisted men, fighter pilots and bomber crew personnel – through occupied territory and into a neutral country where they were handed over, whenever possible, to British agents.”⁷⁵

By late October of 1940, de Gaulle published the *Brazzaville* Manifesto – the basic charter of Free France – declaring the Vichy regime established under Pétain as “unconstitutional and subject to the invader,” explained that it was necessary “that a new power assume the charge of directing the French war effort,” and declared that events have “imposed this sacred duty” on de Gaulle.⁷⁶ On November 11, twenty-two years to the day since Germany had signed the armistice ending World War I, over a thousand schoolchildren in Paris:

Defied a strict German ban by marching down the Champs-Élysées waving flags, singing *la Marseillaise*, and chanting anti-Hitler slogans composed on the spur of the moment. The German police cleared the streets and arrested ninety schoolchildren and fourteen students. The Sorbonne remained closed for a week. ‘Just rousing our self-confidence’ replied one of the young people, when asked the purpose of the demonstration, ‘not rebelling against the *puissance occupante*’.⁷⁷

While the early days of resistance in France were indeed humble, one has to understand that the shock of such a rapid defeat had caused many citizens of France to become disillusioned with the times – causing many to accept defeat and have no desire of changing their circumstances.

When it came to the growth of the Resistance movements in the proper sense, one must first look to the *Musée de l’Homme*. One of the first Resistance cells to form, *Groupe du Musée*

⁷⁵ Rings, 173.

⁷⁶ Funk, 11.

⁷⁷ Rings, 157.

de l'Homme (also known as *Comité National du Salut Public*), combined like-minded ethnologists and anthropologists who worked at the museum with several French communists, who were, at the time, going against the party line, as Russia was still nominally a German ally. Once the cell was established, they immediately set to work on what would become the bulk of French resistance – the clandestine press. Calling their newspaper *Résistance*, their first issue declared their support for de Gaulle, stating “de Gaulle will have all our respect and support: we have to be prudent and give recognition to his political ideals.”⁷⁸ By November of 1940, the leaders of the group, Anatole Lewitsky and Boris Vildé soon expanded their network by contacting other burgeoning Resistance groups in order to coordinate activities towards a single goal. These other networks included: “groups set up by lawyers at the Palais de Justice, by staff at the American Embassy, and by firemen in Paris, as well as very active groups in Bélais, in the Pas-de-Calais, and in Brittany.”⁷⁹ By combining their groups into a single network, they were rapidly able to work in all areas of the clandestine Resistance – disseminating propaganda, gathering intelligence on the German troop movements, and helping the various escape lines to escort Allied soldiers to safety.

The clandestine resistance encompassed many different techniques – as mentioned above, the most common form of resistance were the clandestine newspapers in circulation amongst the European underground - by 1944, over a thousand individual newspapers, (with millions of individual copies printed of each) existed in France. These newssheets were the “logical” development of several leaflets passed along from hand to hand – such as “Jean Texcier’s ‘Advice to the Occupied’ or ‘A Czech’s Ten Commandments’” – which encouraged compiling

⁷⁸ Humbert, 23.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 285.

information, names, addresses, organized military training, and the pursuit of “national invigoration” – sports, excursions, good conversation, et cetera.⁸⁰ These leaflets, and the later developing newspapers were:

Distributed at the risk of people’s lives, and possessed of far greater importance than anyone at first thought possible... once equipped with an illegal news sheet, often handwritten and secretly passed from hand to hand, two or three like-minded friends would begin to form a group and recruit fellow fighters for the common cause. Born in the gloomy depths of the underground but expanding with tremendous speed, the clandestine press became, as it were, the soul of the Resistance... Under German occupation... France [produced at least] 1,034.⁸¹

Other clandestine newssheets were printed anywhere space could be found – garages, factories, laundries, basements –by any means – some used hand set type or copying by hand. *Défense de la France*, for example, was produced by a student group in basements of the Sorbonne, where there was only one entranceway to the press room – through the floor of the Geology Department. *Défense de la France* would eventually move to a more professionally made publication, shifting production into its own print shop, where it was able to reach a peak circulation of 450,000 copies, including some 47 editions, and 300,000 copies between 1943-44. Distribution was organized by the same students who organized printing:

Following a precise distribution plan, several hundred students went in groups from house to house, street to street, and quarter to quarter, pushing copies under doors. One secret office in Paris, headed from 1943 on by Genevieve de Gaulle, the General’s niece, mailed batches of between ten and forty thousand copies of *Défense de la France* to influential figures – and saved on postage by using forged stamps... in 1943, on the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, a few distributors managed to thrust their

⁸⁰Rings, 170.

⁸¹ Rings, 168.

Resistance newspapers into German hands and got away scot-free.⁸²

Other clandestine presses in France printed classical French texts, including those by Aragon and Éluard, Cassou, Chamson, and Vercors.⁸³ These classical French texts, while not necessarily in direct opposition to the German occupation, nonetheless inspired a certain amount of French nationalism and demonstrated that the occupation did not cause France to lose its national identity. Music was also an important symbol to the resistor – French songs, such as *La Marseilles*, and the unofficial song of the Resistance, *Le Chant des Partisans*, acted as “a passionate call to arms, urging working people of all sorts to take their rifles, machine guns, grenades, knives, and dynamite and to ‘kill quickly.’”⁸⁴ Filmmakers also joined in the resistance, although much of their earlier work was censored. While the majority of the Resistance was passive, there was nevertheless an armed Resistance.

The largest group of these resisters would come from left of the political center – socialists, communists, et cetera, though there were some rightists who supported the resistance rather than Vichy, such as the groups known as *Organisation Civile et Militaire* (OCM), and *Défense de la France*. The OCM was founded in 1940 by economist and former banker Maxime Blocq-Mascart, and was distinctly right-winged in its ideology, supporting the creation of an American style presidency after the liberation, and was organized around military lines. Before OCM was ruthlessly eliminated by other resistance groups for collaboration with the German Security Police stationed in Bordeaux, they had stockpiled nearly 75,000 pounds of weapons and

⁸²Rings, 168-169.

⁸³ Ibid., 170.

⁸⁴ Charles Rearick, *The French in Love and War: Popular Culture in the Era of the World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 270.

ammunition stored away in secret caches. Similarly, *Défense de la France* was also slightly right-wing, supporting a similar post-war governmental system. Both the OCM and *Défense* were members of the *Conseil National de la Résistance*. Other major groups of the resistance included the British formed circuits, and the Poles, who wished to relieve pressure on their homeland, much like the communists. The Poles were notable for their efforts towards rescuing downed Allied airmen and establishing links with French spy rings through prisoners of war. Poles living in France had a much higher level of participation in the Resistance than French-born citizens could claim – “of the hundred thousand Poles living in France, some twenty thousand belonged to the Resistance.”⁸⁵

The largest contingent of the Resistance came from the French Communist Party (PCF), numbering slightly more than 10,000 people, and though they would join with the CNR, they remained a somewhat distinct and ultimately unassimilated element within the movement. Initially created in May 1941 as *le Front National*, the most important armed group, (perhaps even the most important of the armed Resistance movement as a whole), was known as the *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans-Main-d’Oeuvre Immigrée* (FTP-MOI). The PCF constituted a very small political party, but a very large Resistance group – some 10,000 civilians could claim membership.

Once Hitler violated the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact) by invading Russia in June of 1941, Moscow would send out a direct order to the PCF to “resume the armed struggle.”⁸⁶ Through their all-out activities in the Resistance, “they had almost succeeded in making Frenchmen forget their record of ‘revolutionary defeatism’ before

⁸⁵Rings, 190.

⁸⁶Marnham, 46-47.

Russia entered the war... they had condemned the Vichy regime...as ‘a government of rotters,’ no better than such ‘crooks, traitors, and thieves’ as Reynaud, Daladier and Blum.”⁸⁷ De Gaulle would refer to those who rushed to the support of Vichy as “*les amants inconsolables de la défaite et de la collaboration*” – disconsolate lovers of defeat and consolation. Other prewar parties of the left, “largely disintegrated after the 1940 collapse, began to pull themselves together by 1941,” basing their organization largely on the example of the PCF.⁸⁸ Other leftist resistance groups included *Libération-Nord*, which was predominantly controlled by socialists.

The first real resistance could only have been possible in the occupied zone – the southern zone did not have enough contact with Nazism in order to develop an early resistance. Resistance in the north was also different from that in the south; the Resistance in the north utilized more militaristic tactics. The nature of southern resistance was more political and passive than anything else. As has already been shown, the Vichy regime was also popular during the early years – perhaps more popular than the Third Republic itself. It was certainly more popular than the Fourth Republic that would be established after the war was over.

Punishment for Resistance was also far more severe in the occupied zone – torture, deportation and execution – than in the free zone – a few months imprisonment in an internment camp. Punishment in the occupied zone also included stiff reprisals for people not included in the Resistance. From the early days of the armed resistance movement, the FTP-MOI carried out a policy of assassinating German soldiers in a successful attempt at incurring German reprisals. The Wehrmacht soldiers would first respond on a one-to-one ratio – one dead civilian for every

⁸⁷Wright, 65.

⁸⁸Ibid., 33.

dead German soldier. Eventually, it expanded to three to one; by September-October of 1941, Germans were executing fifty civilians for every dead soldier. This policy would continue throughout the war – the FTP-MOI would assassinate a few hundred soldiers, many unarmed. Civilian casualties of the reprisals numbered near 40,000.⁸⁹

A decree dated September 16, 1941 justified the shooting of hostages as an extreme form of self-defense by troops on active duty. The decree was initially meant only for the Eastern Front, as part of Hitler's belief in the superiority of the Western European people to their eastern counterpart, though it would eventually expand to all of the occupied territories. This decree would state "in general, the execution of fifty to a hundred communists" was "proper reparation for the death of one German serviceman," where the means of execution should "enhance the deterrent effect," which would be left up to the Senior SS and Police commanders responsible for each area.⁹⁰ In France, this "deterrent effect" was carried out in the form of posters on the walls of Paris buildings which listed the punishment for resistance unless surrender occurred within ten days:

All male relatives in direct line of ascent or descent, as well as brothers-in-laws and cousins will be shot if aged eighteen or over... All women bearing the same degree of affinity will be sentenced to forced labor... All children belonging to the male and female persons affected by the foregoing measures, aged one to seventeen inclusive, will be committed to an educational institution.⁹¹

As Werner Rings later points out:

The more ruthlessly the Germans countered [resistance activities] with harsh reprisals, the more they themselves were provoked by

⁸⁹Marnham, 47.

⁹⁰Rings, 40.

⁹¹Ibid.

deliberate retaliation on the part of the resistance... This idea and the Party directives relating to it were what inspired three armed groups drawn from the French Communist 'youth battalions' to gun down several members of the occupying forces in August and September 1941, including an administrative officer and the German area commander at Nantes – murders which resulted...in the execution of ninety-eight hostages.⁹²

Naturally, as the reprisals grew, so too did popular sentiment against the people who were attacking the Germans – so while they were the ones responsible for the assassinations, the FTP never publicly acknowledged or claimed responsibility for their actions, though after the war, they would (absurdly) estimate that they were killing over 500 Germans per month. In reality, the number was probably closer to about 200 dead Germans over the course of the three years from 1941-1944. German figures from France, in 1943 recorded 281 attempts on the lives of Germans, and another 244 combined attempts on French policemen and collaborators – meaning 53.5 percent of the incidents from that year involved Germans, resulting in about 150 dead or wounded for each group.⁹³ By 1944, Germans would publicly hang ninety-nine Frenchmen on balconies, lampposts, and window grilles along the main roads in Tulle.

By 1941, the Resistance “held almost unanimously that the Third Republic was dead; that its leaders had betrayed their trust, and that a totally new regime – both political and economic – should be built after Vichy’s fall.”⁹⁴ “At least ninety percent of the resistance leaders would have nothing to do with a restoration of the Third Republic, even if the latter were to be remodeled at once,” a request that was answered by de Gaulle when he said “once the enemy has

⁹²Rings, 198.

⁹³Ibid., 198-199.

⁹⁴Wright, 33.

been driven off our soil, all our men and women will elect the National Assembly which will have full power to decide the country's destinies."⁹⁵ The majority of resistance groups joined into a single party, largely absorbed by the communists, the socialists, or the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP). "Almost the only underground remnants to enter politics separately were the M.U.R.F. (*Mouvement Unifié de la Renaissance Française*), a communist affiliate, and the U.D.S.R (*Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance*)."⁹⁶ As to the way the new government would look, unanimity broke down, with three main issues of contention:

(a) Should the new regime be of the presidential type, or a streamlined and strengthened parliamentary model? (b) Should the new constitution be drafted by a constituent assembly chosen by the people after the liberation, or should liberated France be presented with a ready-made constitution drawn up jointly by de Gaulle and the organized underground? (c) Should the prewar profusion of parties be replaced by a new pattern, derived from the new unity of the resistance movement?⁹⁷

As support for the Vichy regime lost support amongst the citizens of the unoccupied zone due to a number of problems (massive arrests of Jews in July and August 1942, the Allied landings in Africa as part of Operation Torch, and the November occupation of the 'free zone') the tide of the war began to turn against Germany. Militarily speaking, losing the battle of Stalingrad in early 1943 was a major defeat for the German armies, as was the success of the Allied campaign in Africa. Domestic problems also caused disenchantment with Vichy, as the implementation of a forced labor organization *Service du Travail Obligatoire*, and the aforementioned *Milice* only aggravated the situation.⁹⁸

⁹⁵Wright, 45.

⁹⁶Ibid., 77-78.

⁹⁷Ibid., 34.

⁹⁸Rearick, 269.

Before Jean Moulin was sent to France in 1942, movements acted independently of each other, largely as spontaneously formed cells. Moulin was given the mission to “unite the Resistance and link it to the Free French,” where he was meant to remodel the Resistance in order to serve de Gaulle’s purpose – the ultimate liberation *of France by France*.⁹⁹ “Efforts to federate the various groups and to co-ordinate their work gradually led to the formation in May 1943 of the National Resistance Council,” or the *Conseil National de la Resistance* (CNR).¹⁰⁰ After the CNR was formed, there was much more cooperation, and much less competition between the members. The creation of the CNR also established a link with de Gaulle, despite the left-wing Resistance suspicions of de Gaulle’s right-wing political standpoint. A further connection between the Resistance and the French Government in Exile would be established with the formation of the Algiers based ‘Consultative Agency,’ in 1943. This committee numbered approximately one hundred people, and it was appointed the goal of representing “both the underground in France and the Gaullist movement in exile. Here for the first time the two currents in the resistance were brought together to compare ideas.”¹⁰¹

By August 1943, as plans became more definite to invade France, the Allies would have to deal with the two-faced problem of French participation in Overlord, and the other, more serious problem, collaboration with Germany. Churchill still hoped to open a new front in the eastern Mediterranean. Failing to persuade Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs, he reluctantly agreed to plans for Overlord. “In spite of the fact that France remained the focal point of Anglo-American strategy, no enthusiasm was expressed concerning the use of French troops in either of

⁹⁹Marnham, 168

¹⁰⁰Wright, 33.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 48.

these operations.”¹⁰² In the planning of the invasion, “it should be remarked at once that the list of subjects for treatment avoided the most pressing problems: command relationships in regard to the use of French forces, interior and exterior; [and] cooperation with the underground.”¹⁰³ As time would tell, Free French troops would only land in France in mid-August of 1944, almost two and a half months after the Normandy invasion.

The growth of the Resistance in the unoccupied zone was slower moving – here, the German presence was less obvious, and the people less concerned with fighting a war that had been fought mainly in the north of France. This is not to say that resistance did not exist south of the demarcation line – Henri Frenay led one of the largest Resistance groups in France that operated out of the unoccupied zone. The group, known as *Combat*, had an estimated strength, in September of 1942, at around 15,000. Within nine months, that number had jumped to an estimated 80,000. While Resistance activities in the south were more limited to passive acts (especially among the more prominent radical leftists, who, almost exclusively, limited their actions to passive resistance until liberation became imminent), there were some armed groups who carried out a recorded 7,000 individual attacks – 1,000 of which targeted a German, and the remaining 6,000 targeted Frenchmen – though these were carried out in the six weeks surrounding the Allied invasion of Normandy in June of 1944.

¹⁰²Funk, 157.

¹⁰³Funk, 246.

CHAPTER 3

THE LATE RESISTANCE AND LIBERATION (1943-1945)

Once the Vichy regime had all but collapsed, those involved in collaborating with the Germans played the role of scapegoat; those involved in the Resistance began to spread the myth that almost all of France was *Résistante* in 1944 – a myth that would help France to accept its recent past and move on. The relationship between Vichy and the Resistance, always a damaged relationship, was thought of as, in the words of Stanley Hoffman, a “localized cancer.”¹⁰⁴ The utter failure of Pétain’s government in Vichy led to the steady growth of the Resistance:

Which gathered itself into a number of large clandestine organizations and was gradually coordinated by Petain’s arch enemy, General de Gaulle, who had installed himself in London at the head of a French National Committee. The various elements of the Resistance movement were amalgamated into a National Resistance Council in May 1943 and eventually subordinated to the Provisional Government of the French Republic, formed in June of the same year. The fighting that now broke out – in defiance of Petain, the occupying power, and organizations composed of French Nazi extremists – was conducted with an unsurpassed ferocity by both sides.¹⁰⁵

Where armed resistance did occur in the unoccupied zone, there were several necessary circumstances – it took time to mature into an organized movement, and even then, only after a long and laborious process. By the time that armed and organized resistance was able to become

¹⁰⁴Hoffman, 35.

¹⁰⁵Rings, 71.

a single, unified movement, the war had long been decided. The battle of Stalingrad was over before *any* real armed resistance appeared at all. For obvious reasons too: the Wehrmacht had left the south of France unoccupied for the better part of two and a half years (the south was only occupied after November of 1942); Pétain's leadership was totalitarian in nature, causing many to balk at the idea of resistance; perhaps most importantly, the unoccupied zone held on to the allegiance of France's vast colonial empire. In May 1943, the *Oberbefehlshaber West* (Commander in Chief West), first reported that 'armed guerilla bands' "five hundred strong had formed... [consisting] of deserters from the labor service – parties of men who had evaded conscription by taking to the woods without military organization and equipment."¹⁰⁶ It was at this time that the Resistance began to take on militarized lines – some wore uniforms, others wore armbands – as a way of identifying other members. The bulk of resistance in the southern zone was composed of three main resistance groups – *Combat*, formed and led by Henri Frenay, *Libération-Sud*, mainly socialist in its beliefs, and, of course, the FTP. *Combat* was the largest, and was initially formed on the basis of five main tenets:

The first step was to recruit kindred spirits; the second to wield them together by organizational means. Thirdly, illegal propaganda would be used to swell the movement's ranks and boost the morale of those who were still of two minds. Next, the enemy had to be kept under surveillance and his strengths and weaknesses probed by a secret intelligence service. Finally, consideration would be given to building up an armed force, or 'secret army'. Every form of resistance, from the symbolic to the offensive, was thus to be practiced under central control.¹⁰⁷

When asked about the organization and purpose of the 'secret army,' Frenay responded saying "We have forged no army...this term summons up the picture of a well-organized,

¹⁰⁶Rings, 155-156.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 207-208.

mobile, close-knit mass which blindly obeys any conceivable order. In reality, we have raised bands of partisans who would still sooner fight for their own liberties than against the outside enemy.”¹⁰⁸ In March 1943, these three groups would merge into one group – known as the United Resistance Movements, with Frenay’s *Combat* as the main leadership force (as a result of their numerical superiority – estimated at 15,000 in September of 1942, and 80,000 by June 1943).¹⁰⁹

It was at this point, in 1943, after the Casablanca Conference, that de Gaulle came to seriously be considered as a leader of the French government in exile. Up until this conference, de Gaulle had been “largely a British preoccupation” and “the United States had maintained only casual and intermittent relations with the Free French”, assuming “that such relations possessed minor importance as far as American interests were considered.”¹¹⁰

Naturally enough, with the growth of the Resistance came the growth of a counter-Resistance – military units, including the *milice*, came to be used against the Resistance from 1943 until the end of the war. Part of the strategy utilized by these units was infiltration – spies and other agents would attempt to infiltrate resistance cells. Jean Moulin would be betrayed by one such spy ring in 1943, and subsequently executed for his actions. Spies were also aided by mistakes made by the members of the Resistance – also occurring in 1943, a large group of agents, known as the Prosper Network, were congregating in Paris (in defiance of their orders) were infiltrated, and arrested by the *Sicherheitsdienst* (the SD, or one branch of the German

¹⁰⁸Rings, 205.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 210

¹¹⁰Funk, 4.

security force). In this instance, mistakes were made by one of the leaders, Henri Déricourt, who had not coded their correspondence adequately enough.

Throughout this time, sabotage continued to be a major part of the Resistance, though they were now generally redirected at new targets. Early sabotage aimed at attacking Germany's means of production – factories and plants. Come 1943, sabotage was now aimed at the German infrastructure and installations themselves – a fact attested to by German statistical records. Of all of the major acts of sabotage occurring in France between January and October of 1943, 54 percent was directed against German installations (62 percent of those attacks were direct attacks on the railroad tracks and equipment used by Germany). Construction crews would:

Surreptitiously [blend] their cement with a few pounds of sugar, because 'sweetened' concrete would one day crumble under moderate stress or even under the blast from a near miss... [and] over ten thousand railroadmen are reported to have engaged in non-violent acts of sabotage, such as deliberately misrouting freight trains and working to rule.¹¹¹

In late 1943, after a failed British air raid on the Peugeot Works in France, "British agents got in touch with the Peugeot family, who were pro-British, and arranged that a sabotage team should lay modest demolition charges at various key points in the factories, thereby crippling production without causing severe damage and loss of life."¹¹² Events such as this became common as the Normandy invasion neared.

With the dawn of 1944, one runs into the inevitable problem that comes with studying the French Resistance - the myth created by de Gaulle about France liberating herself with the aid of all of its citizens, as well as the problem with de Gaulle discrediting the Resistance as a whole. It was a nice idea, symbolizing French unity in opposition to Nazism, as well as allowed for the

¹¹¹Rings, 192.

¹¹²Ibid., 203.

reminiscing on France's history as being revolutionary, though it is simply not historically accurate. It has already been shown that the Resistance was a minority movement, with as small as two percent of the population taking part after 1944. After the liberation, there was hope amongst all of the resistance groups that de Gaulle would govern through the CNR and other, local, Committees of Liberation, in order to preserve the wartime unity of the Resistance. De Gaulle, however, soon dashed all of these hopes when he marched into Paris, ultimately sidetracking the CNR, and "made it clear that the resistance movement could expect no political monopoly."¹¹³ The Communists would complain after the fact that when de Gaulle arrived "on liberation day, he had first gone to the *Arc de Triomphe*, the Prefecture of Police, and *Notre Dame*, and only then to the City Hall to say '*un petit bon jour*' to the National Resistance Council."¹¹⁴

The year 1944 also saw the increased efforts of outside nations in stirring up resistance – starting in January, the Allies began to supply the fighting resistance with arms and supplies, as arranged by the SOE. Between the British and American airdrops, a total of perhaps half a million weapons were sent to the resisters – with "about three-fifths of those weapons in useful hands at the critical period."¹¹⁵ The Allied High Command sponsored the creation of more than a dozen escape routes, such as the "Pat" Line, which aided in the rescue of over 700 resisters and Allied soldiers. Almost a dozen more were established and code-named after French wines, by agents of de Gaulle, who were parachuted into France, some 1,400 by 1944. The Dutch Government in exile also maintained two escape lines through France. Dwight Eisenhower

¹¹³Wright, 64-65.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Foot, 249.

would give a statement to the Allies, part of which related directly to any future uprising in France – “Citizens of France! I am proud to have again under my command the gallant forces of France. Fighting besides their Allies, they will play a worthy part in the liberation of their homeland... Follow the instructions of your leaders. A premature uprising of all Frenchmen may prevent you from being of maximum help to your country in the critical hour. Be patient. Prepare.”¹¹⁶

This final piece of advice – ‘be patient’ – was perhaps the one thing that should be taken away by the resistance – the lack of patience, and carrying out acts of resistance prematurely could result in several drawbacks – German soldiers would be kept on their toes, making it harder for the Allies to gain the upper hand; and second, such acts allowed the Gestapo to find resisters, “perhaps even hundreds of thousands, of men and women whose efforts would have been infinitely more useful at the right moment.”¹¹⁷

On June 5, 1944, the eve of the invasion of France, Eisenhower gave another statement, this one, directly to the citizens, and resisters of France. In this statement, he would say:

For a nation which fights bound hand and foot against an oppressor armed to the teeth, battle discipline imposes several conditions. The first is strict obedience to instructions given by the French government and by French leaders which it has qualified to so act. The second condition is that our action in the rear of the enemy shall be coordinated as closely as possible with the action of the Allied and French armies. Now, we must expect that the struggle of the armies will be hard and long. That means that the action of the forces of the Resistance must go on and increase to the moment of the German collapse.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶Funk, 258.

¹¹⁷Mengin, 217.

¹¹⁸Funk, 260.

April 1944 is notable for two major decisions made by the Allies – decisions which would reduce the ability of the British to “bring about an improvement of relations with Algiers.”

These two decisions are summarized by Funk:

On April 1 the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed that no information should be released to the French which might compromise ‘Overlord’ and two weeks later, on April 17, the British government itself placed a restriction on all communications coming from or to Great Britain.... It was ironic that after de Gaulle had taken the drastic step which theoretically gave Soustelle undisputed control of the French intelligence services, the head of DGSS could not effectively control contacts with the Resistance via London because of the communications restriction.¹¹⁹

These two decisions would have a profound impact on relations with de Gaulle, who would have probably felt as though he was merely a pawn of the Allied Chiefs of Staff – what could have amounted to a dangerous situation, Roosevelt and Churchill agreed to invite de Gaulle to London, where a third party, Marie Pierre Koenig, would reveal Allied plans for Overlord. Roosevelt’s statement to Koenig is summarized by a single, partial sentence: “I agree that you have the full authority to discuss matters with the French Committee on a military level.”¹²⁰

Jedburgh parties, created by the SOE, composed of international teams of three, (always consisting of one Frenchman, one Brit, and one American), acted as “local stiffeners of fighting resistance in June-September 1944.”¹²¹ Their ultimate goal was to evaluate the strength of the forces available on the ground, and bring them together into a unified movement with a single

¹¹⁹Funk, 239-240.

¹²⁰Ibid., 248.

¹²¹For more on Jedburgh Parties, see: Colin Beavan, *Operation Jedburgh: America’s First Shadow War* (New York, Penguin Books, 2007); Rings, 246-247.

strategy. Jedburgh parties were joined by teams formed by the British Special Air Service (SAS).

These SAS teams:

Worked, over most of northern France, as an invaluable stiffening to resistance; a party of ninety of them in the Vosges distracted an entire SS division from the main battle. Four Jeep-loads of them once took on a force 3,000 strong, near Chalons-sur-Saone; all but two of the SAS were killed, but they took 400 Germans with them.¹²²

The armed resistance during this late stage of the war comprised of two major components – the cutting and disabling of rail-transport, and violent uprisings, especially in Paris during the months from June to August. In terms of fighting resistance, the most notable incident occurred during the month of August – after four years of German occupation, the combined strength of the clandestine press, anti-German radio broadcasts, and Allied propaganda had created enough anti-Nazi and pro-Gaullist feeling to sustain a mild national uprising lasting until the German withdrawal was complete in mid-September. Some groups of the clandestine press even combined their printing activities with armed resistance, as evidenced by a little known event occurring in April 1944. In this act of resistance, a “commando team invaded the premises of the *Schoonhovense Courant* in southern Holland and compelled the staff, at gunpoint, to print an illegal edition.”¹²³

As M.R.D. Foot writes:

There is a delicate and difficult calculation, waiting to be made one day, about the degree of tactical help that resistance provided for ‘Overlord’s’ advance: through the total disruption of the French and Belgian railway systems (950 rail cuts in France on the night of 5/6 June 1944, the night of ‘Neptune’), the dislocation of long distance telephones, and the perpetual ambushes on the roads, the

¹²²Foot, 252.

¹²³Rings, 170.

Germans came to feel they no longer controlled their own lines of communication.¹²⁴

The Paris uprising also gave Resistance filmmakers an opportunity to film the resistance firsthand – beginning on August 13, 1944, “they turned their cameras on the street fighting that became a large insurrection over the following weeks...that film and others showing Nazi-fighting Frenchmen... did much to establish the ‘myth of a France almost unanimously resistant – the myth of a great majority of Frenchmen heroically struggling against Nazis and a small minority of collaborators.’”¹²⁵ The communists and the Paris police force were the most active heads of the insurrection. All in all, over one thousand resisters, and six hundred civilians were killed.¹²⁶

Operation Dragoon, the Allied invasion of southern France, beginning on August 15, 1944, was helped even more visibly than ‘Neptune.’ During the preparation phase for Dragoon, small parties of French naval officers were sent to Marseilles, Toulon, and Sete to preserve port installations targeted for destruction by the retreating Germans. The French commander allowed the *maquis* to utilize several American armored cars to defend a mountain road from Nice through Digne and Gap; Grenoble surrendered to the *maquis* on D-day plus seven.¹²⁷

By September 1944, de Gaulle’s Free French Army had grown to more than half a million men – though ninety-one percent were colonial troops, forty-five percent of these colonial troops coming from territorial Africa. Despite the strength of de Gaulle’s forces, no

¹²⁴Foot, 252.

¹²⁵Rearick, 271.

¹²⁶Ouston, 219.

¹²⁷Ibid.

French soldier landed in France until August 15th, when three Free French divisions landed as part of Dragoon, and liberated Toulon and Marseille – the liberation of Paris would begin four days later.

Industrial sabotage continued to be a major strategy of the resisters – now coordinated by a “workers operation,” the sabotaging of railroads and other installations was organized along military lines by (at least somewhat) professional resisters:

Overt acts of violence intended to jolt and rouse the public, as well as coordinated bomb attacks, assassinations, and punitive expeditions against collaborators and enemy agents, were carried out by ‘Groupes francs’ or special task forces recruited for that purpose. Other groups were responsible for the manufacture of false papers, for concealment and subsistence in the Underground, and for supporting the dependents of colleagues who had been arrested or executed. Others, again, organized the infiltration of the public services, ran the overseas courier service, supplied the *maquis*, and, last but not least, administered the so-called Secret Army.¹²⁸

At the same time, supposed resistance groups also acted as collaborators, as evidenced by the actions of the OCM in mid-1944. As alluded to earlier, OCM was eliminated by fellow resisters for collaborating with the German Security Police, though it is necessary to understand the circumstances before one passes judgment. The fighting strength of OCM had been severely weakened after 300 of its best men had been captured and imprisoned. In exchange for the release of prisoners, OCM turned over 45,000 pounds of ammunition and weapons, “including two thousand submachine guns and a millions rounds of ammunition,” and though “three hundred fighting men [had been saved, and] thirty tons of arms and ammunition retained... it... was then regarded as ‘trafficking with the enemy,’ or treason.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸Rings, 208.

¹²⁹Ibid., 147-148.

Throughout this time, the French Forces of the Interior (FFI), the organized resistance army at the end of the Second World War, were increasing their pressure on the remnants of the German army, with guns shooting from every direction.¹³⁰ The FFI saw an increase in membership around this time, owing to the merger between the *Mouvements Unis de la Résistance* (MUR), the Army Resistance Organizers, and the FTP. This restructuring also led to the Resistance becoming much more like a proper army – and the FFI, now numbering 80,000, provided flank defense for the Allied troops in their northern advance. FFI units also seized control of Savoy, taking 50,000 German prisoners in the process, while fighting as a makeshift infantry division.

The *maquis* also saw a major increase in their fighting strength, largely as a result of the new German forced labor policy – the *Service du travail obligatoire*. When asked why he joined the *maquis*, Emile Coulaudon, known as ‘Colonel Gaspar,’ responded “It was, after all, a Nazi regime, a totalitarian regime, no matter how you look at it. It was worth fighting for, it was even worth dying for, rather than to live as slaves.”¹³¹ Though history has somewhat exaggerated their importance, they still numbered between thirty and forty thousand by mid 1943, with over twenty thousand in the southern zone. In February of 1944, “the *maquisards* of Beyssenac were attacked by SS units based at Limoges. Fighting continued for hours, but the *maquis* commander later reported that his unit had been completely wiped out ‘without even wounding a single SS man.’”¹³² By the summer of 1944, the estimated total strength of the *maquis* numbered as high

¹³⁰Carles, 218.

¹³¹Ophuls.

¹³²Rings, 210.

as 80,000. Allied airdrops began to arrive, supplying the *maquis* with arms, ammunition, explosives, and other military equipment. Learning of the Allied invasion of France, the *maquis* in the south (somewhat) jumped the gun, and made independent attempts to seize bases for the use of the Allies. The attempt would fail, miserably – the Germans retaliated massively, using tanks, artillery, and aircraft. “Every spark of resistance was extinguished within a matter of days. Nobody remained to bury the seven hundred slaughtered pistol-fighters apart from a few horrified civilians.”¹³³

In the period after the liberation, the citizens of France, angry at their recent history of collaboration with the Germans, began a new policy of “people’s justice” – ordinary people acting as vigilantes in order to eliminate other civilians. In most cases, those persecuted in this period were collaborators – though there were also some resistance groups who attacked their fellow resisters in an attempt to have an advantage in the post-war world. Collaborators played the role of scapegoat – more often than not, those most vocal in their opposition to the collaborators were “men who had first put their faith in Pétain and shared in Vichy’s integral nationalism of 1940-41.”¹³⁴ Women who had had relations with German soldiers were also publicly humiliated, many were stripped naked and had their heads publicly shaved.

On August 25, 1944, the liberation of Paris was complete, and the resistance was all but finished. On August 26, de Gaulle and other figureheads of the Free French movement marched down the Champs Elysées. Over the next four days, Toulon, Marseilles, and Montpellier were also liberated. By September 9, representatives of the Resistance movements joined with the Provisional French government, and the Resistance was officially over. France would again be

¹³³Rings, 246-247.

¹³⁴ Hoffman, 35.

free of occupation after the Allies pushed German forces across the Rhine in early February 1945.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In looking at the French Resistance as a whole, one notices several important things. First, the French mood towards the war was apathetic at the start of hostilities, and this continued as the war progressed. Resistance to the German onslaught started in the aftermath of a complete collapse of the French military, considered one of the finest land armies on the European continent. This deep seated malaise towards the war carried over to the post-armistice period.

Secondly the Resistance was not a popular movement – many more French citizens would rather survive the war, doing whatever they could to make sure that happened – at times that meant collaboration; at other times, it meant passivity – indeed, many citizens acted no differently after June 1940 as they had before. Only two percent of the population would take part in the resistance, *after the Normandy invasion* – as little as fifteen hundredths of a percent of the population were true, patriotic, resisters. Fewer than one in five soldiers of the French Army joined de Gaulle in Great Britain before 1943. Further debunking the myth that the Resistance was a popular movement, one must take into account who was resisting – for the most parts, communists, socialists, and other members of the political left – those right of the political center were more commonly allied with Vichy or worked as collaborators.

Third, Charles de Gaulle, the man most often associated with the Resistance, in reality, played only a minor role. While he was responsible for the idea behind the creation of the *Mouvements Unis de Résistance*, the grunt work was completed by agents in France – Jean Moulin and the like. De Gaulle neither put himself at risk like the more active resisters inside of

France, nor did he acknowledge their work once he took power in 1945. For the first two years of the Resistance, de Gaulle had no connections whatsoever with the networks who were combating the German occupation. The use of the myth that all of France participated in its liberation, was most likely an attempt by de Gaulle to repair the image problem of wartime collaboration, while also paving a path to his assumption to power by utilizing an appeal to the people. Distrusted by the Allied leaders, de Gaulle did not even factor into the Allied military plans until almost 1944 – after the war had already been decided.

The leadership of Vichy France also did much to expose the weaknesses of the Third Republic. Already outdated at the start of the war, by 1945, it was downright antediluvian. As unpopular as the German occupation may have been, the leadership of Vichy was, for a time, the most popular government in French history – leading many would-be resisters to hold off. The willingness to collaborate with Germany far outweighed the willingness to resist. Finally, while the legacy of the Resistance depicts an image of armed struggle against an occupier, the story in France is much different. While there was some armed resistance, particularly in the last eighteen months or so of the war, the most common resistance activities were limited to intelligence gathering, espionage, and sabotage.

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